



Narcissistic Love Bombing Cycle: Idealize, Devalue, Discard

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The narcissistic love bombing cycle is a term used to describe a pattern of behavior often exhibited by individuals with narcissistic traits in the context of relationships.

It is a manipulative tactic that typically occurs in the early stages of a relationship when the narcissist is trying to win over their partner.

The cycle generally begins with love bombing, where the narcissist showers their partner with intense affection and attention to create a strong bond. This leads to idealization, where the partner is placed on a pedestal and a deep sense of connection is established.

Gradually, the narcissist will begin to devalue their partner, becoming critical, degrading, and distant.

This cycle often culminates in a discard where the narcissist abruptly ends the relationship with little explanation.

In some cases, the narcissist might engage in “hoovering,” which involves attempting to draw the partner back into the relationship through love bombing and promises of change.

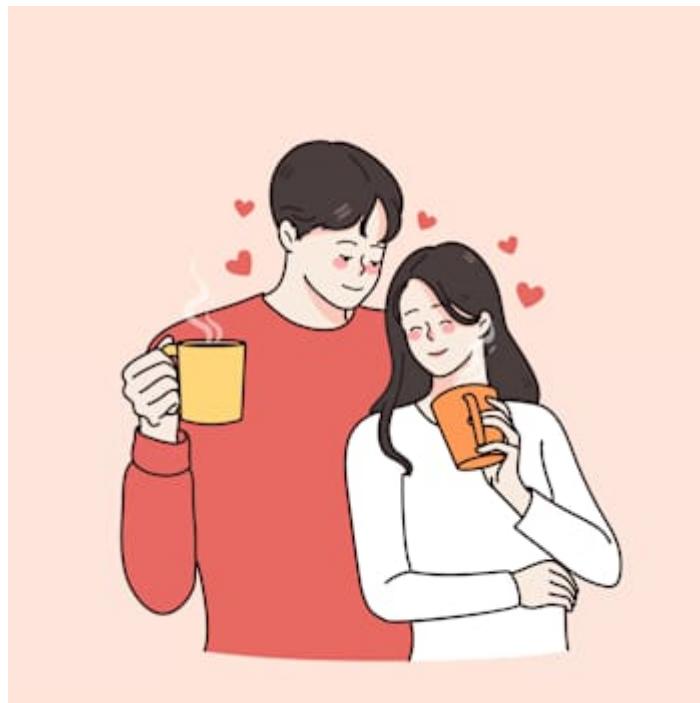
If the partner returns to the relationship, the cycle often repeats itself, only to end in eventual devaluation and discard.



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What Happens during the love bombing phase?

During the love bombing phase, the narcissist will shower their partner with an overwhelming amount of affection, compliments, and attention.



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They may engage in excessive communication, buy lavish gifts, make future plans, or execute grand romantic gestures to make their partner feel special.

The goal is to create a sense of deep connection and dependency, making the partner more vulnerable to the narcissist's manipulation and control tactics as the relationship progresses.

Narcissists can be incredibly charming and seductive, so it can be difficult for the partner to see the potential manipulative nature behind their behavior.

In a [qualitative study](#) by Day, Townsend, and Grenyer (2021) on the interpersonal dysfunction within narcissistic relationships, participants described the pattern of interactions with their partners. One woman noted:

“At first, it was great. He made it seem like he was my saviour. He was kind, loving and attentive.”

Another woman expressed:

“Our early relationship felt like a fairy tale; I'd never been adored and idealized before and was totally sucked in. [He] was very charming in the beginning.

He pursued me hard and fast and I didn't quite know what was happening...He complimented me, put me on a pedestal, and told me he loved me really early on in the game. I was flattered.”

How Long Does the Love Bombing Phase Last With a Narcissist?

The duration of the love bombing phase can vary depending on several factors, including the narcissist's tactics, the personality of the partner, and the specific circumstances of the relationship.

The love bombing phase tends to be relatively short-lived, though, compared to the entire duration of the relationship. It can last anywhere from a few weeks to a few months or even a year.

[One survey](#) conducted among 500 individuals who experienced love bombing from their partners estimated that the average duration of the love bombing phase is five-and-a-half months with narcissistic men and three-and-a-half months with narcissistic women.

The maximum duration of the love bombing phase reported in the survey was six months.

Narcissists will use love bombing to quickly establish a strong emotional connection and gain control over their partner.

Once they feel that they have secured the partner's emotional attachment and dependence, they will start transitioning into the devaluation phase, where they begin to show less interest and affection and start exhibiting manipulative behaviors.

What Comes After Love Bombing With a Narcissist?

As the relationship progresses, the narcissist's behavior starts to change. After the love bombing phase with a narcissist comes the phase of devaluation.

Devaluation

The “devaluation” phase is when the dynamics of the relationship start to shift dramatically, and the intense affection and positive attention give way to more negative behaviors.

The narcissist will become critical, dismissive, and potentially even emotionally or verbally abusive towards their partner.

The narcissist may also use manipulative tactics, such as gaslighting or blame-shifting, to control the partner's emotions and behavior.

The affection and intimacy that were abundant during the love bombing phase start to diminish, leaving the partner feeling isolated and unloved.

This abrupt shift can be deeply hurtful and confusing for the partner, who may struggle to understand where the relationship went wrong.

Discard or Hoovering

When the victim no longer serves a purpose or holds value for the narcissist, or when the narcissist has found a new source of attention or validation, they often will discard their victim.

During the discard phase of the narcissistic love pattern, the narcissist might abruptly end the relationship or pull away emotionally.

Below, two victims of narcissistic abuse share their experiences of how the idealization phase was inevitably followed by devaluation, and eventual discard:

"He pressured me into getting married very quickly. After we got married he changed [and] became prone to extreme anger if I didn't compliment him enough. He is explosive, seems totally unemotional, and unstable."



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"When we first met he drew me in fast...I was so taken in with this guy. He made himself to be everything I had ever wanted.

After several months the lectures started...he would spend hours criticizing me, blaming me for everything. I had no local family or friends and the loneliness was horrible... Over the next years the lectures became more frequent and more harsh with increased name calling and blame.

Anytime he was in a bad mood or had a bad day, where something didn't go his way, he would spend the rest of the night lecturing me. He would use sex as a means to get the lectures to stop, saying that he would stop talking if I sexually gratified him."

Instead of a discard, the narcissist might engage in "hoovering," which involves attempting to draw the partner back into the relationship after the devaluation (or discard) phase.

They may use manipulation, guilt-tripping, promises of change, or even renewed love bombing to regain the partner's attention and control.

What are the Warning Signs of Love Bombing?

Recognizing the warning signs of love bombing is crucial in identifying if you are in a manipulative and unhealthy relationship.

Signs of Love Bombing

- Showering you with intense and immediate affection, compliments, and attention right from the start of the relationship
- Talking about deep commitment, future plans, and being in love within a short period of knowing you
- Constantly contacting you, whether through text, calls, or social media (and becoming upset if you don't respond immediately)
- Telling you that you are perfect or the best thing that has ever happened to them
- Showing signs of extreme jealousy
- Isolating you from your friends, family, or other relationships to make you more dependent on them
- Presenting you with lavish gifts, extravagant outings, and other grand gestures

LOVE BOMBING: WARNING SIGNS

- Intense immediate affection and attention
- Discussing deep commitment and future plans too early
- Excessive compliments and claiming you're "perfect"
- Lavish gifts and grand gestures
- Pressure to commit or make decisions quickly
- Constant contact and expecting immediate responses

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Things to Pay Attention to Within Yourself

When dealing with potential love bombing or manipulative behavior, paying attention to your own feelings, thoughts, and reactions is crucial for maintaining your emotional well-being and making informed decisions.

Here are some things to pay attention to within yourself:

- Experiencing intense highs and lows in your emotions due to the relationship
- Feeling smothered or overwhelmed by your partner
- Feeling obligated to spend time with them or to reply to every message immediately
- Spending less time with friends and family
- Feeling pressured to commit or make decisions before you're ready
- Becoming overly dependent on your partner emotionally, financially, or otherwise
- Constantly trying to meet their expectations
- Changing your habits, interests, or values to align more with theirs

If you suspect you're in a relationship with someone who exhibits this cycle or you're concerned about the dynamics of your relationship, consider seeking support from a trusted friend, family member, or mental health professional.

FAQs

Do Narcissists Enjoy Love Bombing?

Yes, narcissists often enjoy love bombing.

Love bombing is a tactic that aligns with many narcissists' desire for attention, admiration, and control over others. It allows them to create an intense and seemingly perfect connection with their target, fostering dependency and emotional manipulation.

Why do Narcissists Use Love Bombing?

Narcissists use love bombing as a strategic tactic to manipulate and control their targets.

Love bombing establishes a deep emotional connection and dependency, giving the narcissist control over their target's emotions and decisions.

Additionally, successful love bombing reinforces the narcissist's inflated sense of self-worth as the positive reactions from their targets feed their ego and emphasize their belief that they are exceptional.



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Is Love Bombing Only Done by Narcissists?

While love bombing is generally associated with narcissistic behavior, it is not exclusive to narcissists.

Love bombing can be exhibited by individuals with various motivations and personality traits, but [research](#) has found that people who have higher rates of narcissism are more likely to engage in love bombing.

Love bombing can also be seen in individuals who are genuinely infatuated or excited about a new relationship. They might express their feelings intensely and passionately without having manipulative intentions.

However, if these behaviors are persistent, extreme, and accompanied by other manipulative tactics or a lack of empathy, it could signal deeper issues.

Are Narcissists Aware of Love Bombing?

Narcissists are typically aware of their use of love bombing as a manipulative tactic.

Love bombing is a calculated behavior employed by narcissists to gain control, admiration, or emotional dependence from their targets.

However, it's important to note that narcissists may not see their behavior as problematic. They might rationalize their actions, believing that their love bombing is a way to show their partner how much they care or that they genuinely believe in the intensity of their feelings in the moment.

Sources

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